

# THE IVANSK PROJECT e-NEWSLETTER

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*by* **Gary Lipton** (*with* **Arthur E. Zimmerman**)

Born in Ivansk in the 1920s, Yidel shares his childhood memories of shtetl life. In the early 1930s the dismal economy in Ivansk forced his family to move to Łódź. Yidel's innate artistic talents emerged when he was teenager. He created numerous canvases both before and even during the war. Sadly, most of these works have been lost. A few were miraculously found after the war. In 1950 Yidel moved to Canada where he married, raised a family and continued to paint to critical acclaim.

### ○ **Searching for Ivansk in the Kielce Polish State Archives**

*by* **Pawel Skowron**

Pawel Skowron is currently working towards his PhD on the interwar history of the Jews of Chmielnik, a shtetl in the same region of Poland as Ivansk. Much of his research is being carried out in the Kielce Polish State Archives, which also houses material about Iwaniska. He has kindly provided us with the first of a series of documents relating to the lives of Ivanskers before WWII.

### ○ **Ivansker Teenagers Appreciate Their Heritage**

*by* **Norton Taichman**

Our teenagers are seriously interested in their heritage and will eagerly accept the responsibility of becoming the guardians of their family's history and preserving Jewish memory. It is up to us, their parents, grandparents and other relatives to nourish their curiosity and encourage them to discover who they are and where they came from.

**It is a pleasure to acknowledge the help of Laurie Naiman, Lilach Taichman and Louise Taichman in producing this issue of the e-Newsletter.**

## Yidel Podeswa, Artist and Ivansker

by Gary Lipton (with Arthur E. Zimmerman ), Toronto, Canada

On June 30, 2004, Arthur Zimmerman and I met with Yidel Podeswa and his wife Ruth at their home in Toronto. We were there to obtain Yidel's childhood memories of Ivansk. Bonnie Gould accompanied me for a second meeting with Yidel and Ruth in the summer of 2007.



**Yidel and Ruth Podeswa  
- At Home -  
Toronto, 2007**

The purpose of the interviews was to have Yidel shed light on daily life in Ivansk during the 1920's and the 1930's. It was not our primary intent to learn about his Holocaust experiences. That story is both personal and sensitive and would fill a large volume. Rather, we hoped that Yidel would provide information on the personal lives of his family and shed light on the rhythm of life in the shtetl.

It is important to understand that Yidel's memories of Ivansk are fragmentary. His family moved to Łódź sometime in the mid 1930's when he was perhaps 10-12 years old. His memory may have been affected by poverty and hunger that he endured as a youth. As well, the loss of his entire family in the Holocaust meant that he missed opportunities to reminisce about his childhood with parents, siblings, cousins, or even neighbours. During our conversations Yidel expressed himself in short, poignant statements, careful to say exactly what he recalled. Perhaps there is something of the artist in both his memories and his precise manner of expression. In the story that follows Yidel's narrative is presented in italics. Serving as editor, I provided commentary and other information that appear in standard font.

### The Early Years

*I was born and raised in Ivansk<sup>1</sup>. My earliest memories were of growing up very poor but having a happy childhood with a loving family. Ivansk was not a bad place, just very poor. My immediate*

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<sup>1</sup> The exact date of Yidel's birth is not known. According to records from Dachau concentration camp where Yidel was liberated at the end of the war, he was born on December 10, 1924..

family consisted of my mother and father, Devorah Laufer and Chaim Podeszwa, my two brothers, Meyer (Melech) and Alter, and my five sisters, Malka, Gittel, Temma, Tzirel and Pessel. We lived together in the home of my mother's father, Yankel Laufer and his second wife Sorel<sup>2</sup>. My father's parents, Yuma (Benjamin) and Pessel Podeszwa lived next door along with my father's sisters, Tzirel and Faiga.

Our home was very modest. My grandparents lived on the main floor and my entire family had the upstairs. Rain came in from the leaky roof. The house was without electricity or running water and had no separate kitchen. A cast iron wood-burning stove served for cooking and heating, a table for eating and working, and beds were placed around the walls. Light was provided by a kerosene lamp. The house was made of bricks, and the walls were periodically painted with lime whitewash. Some Jewish homes had their own outhouse facilities. Our family shared the outhouse at the back of Zaida Yankel Laufer's house.



**Ivansk: Yankel Laufer (seated)**  
Yankel was Yidel's maternal grandfather. He is surrounded by other family members.

We were very poor. My father earned a meager income white-washing homes, especially before Pesach. Food was scarce. My mother baked bread about every two weeks. We could have eaten it all in one day, but it had to last until my mother baked again. Local farmers provided apples and pears, as well as milk and cheese. Meat was reserved for very special occasions.

Water for drinking and cooking was brought from a well. The Podeszwa and Laufer homes were located only a few steps away from a well on the road leading out of town to Staszów (see Kesten-Brauner (K-B) map). [Ivansk had at least 2 additional wells, perhaps more.]

Laundry was taken by the women of the family up the road to Apt (Opatów), past the church to the river (Koprzywianka), where people also washed themselves. A branch of the river ran to the mikve. A trip to the mikve on Friday was a weekly ritual.

Food and other necessities were obtained from small grocery stores on the street or bordering the central market square (the "Rynek"; see the K-B map). Jewish merchants owned most stores and shops (which also served as dwellings). The center of the square was an open common area. Mondays were market days. Farmers came with horse-drawn wagons and sold their produce from the back of their wagons. The farmers were

all Gentiles. Portable stalls and displays were set up by townsfolk and peddlers who offered a variety of goods for sale. My grandfather, Zaida Yuma and his two daughters, Fayge and Tzirel, sewed shirts and sold them at the market.

<sup>2</sup> The homes of the Laufer and Podeszwa families are #56 and #57 in the "Kesten-Brauner (K-B) Map of Ivansk". The map can be viewed on our web site:

[http://www.ivanskproject.org/Photos/Ivansk\\_mapKB.html](http://www.ivanskproject.org/Photos/Ivansk_mapKB.html)

Yidel's father, Chaim, literally married the girl next door. Yidel recalled that his paternal grandfather, Yuma Podeszwa, visited Toronto many times before the war. Apparently, "He could imitate any instrument with his mouth and was invited to entertain at weddings."

*I went to Polish school during the day. Afterwards, I studied religious subjects at the house of the melamed. I remember two rabbis: a young Ivansker rabbi<sup>3</sup>, as well as the Shedlover rabbi who often visited the town<sup>4</sup>. Every Friday as Shabbos approached the "Shabbos Klapper" walked through Ivansk knocking on the door of every Jewish home. On Shabbos I got dressed up and wore a satin hat. The men went to shul. I recall paintings on the walls of the shul. These memories of Shabbos are good memories. The women did not go to shul with us. No doubt they were at home preparing the Shabbat meal.*

## Art as a Family Tradition

Painting was a Podeswa family tradition. Yidel's father, not only painted houses but was an artist as well. *My father never saw a picture in his life. The only pictures he ever saw, besides the paintings on the walls of the Ivansk shul, were on paper candy wrappers.*



**The Gravesite. by Chaim Podeszwa**

One of the two oil paintings that Yidel's father sent to Canada in 1935 is shown (oil on canvas; 18" x 25")  
An English translation of the Hebrew inscription on the matzevah reads:

*Because of this, I cry  
For my mother, my teacher  
Molly, daughter of Kalman  
Who died on the second day  
Of Chol Hamoed Pesach  
5763 [1913]*

The matzevah sits on a stone wall guarded by two conical pillars and a Polish eagle. A blue vessel (with flower) and a peacock are seen on either side. The rainbow represents a traditional symbol of hope for the future.

Due to amazing circumstances two of Yidel's father's paintings have survived. In 1935 both were rolled and mailed to Surah Temma, Yidel's aunt who lived in Toronto.

*Life in Ivansk in the 1930's was difficult. Most people, Jews and Gentiles, were very poor. And yet there was a spiritual richness. As children we played with nuts. We would roll metal rings with sticks about the town. I recall that there were many Jewish movements active in Ivansk. As a religious family we did not participate in the Zioninst movement.*

*I was not the only member of my family who became an artist. My elder brother Melech was a great painter. He moved to Lodz where he and his friend Tvilich studied in the studio of a Bulgarian artist named Bengoli who taught them to paint with a palette knife. Melech created hundreds of paintings in Łódź, signing his name as "Wl. Padolski." Thus far, nothing that he created has been found since the war.*

*Continued next page*

<sup>3</sup> Yidel may be referring to Rabbi Rabinowitz who addressed his congregation in the Jewish cemetery on the eve of the Nazi deportation from Ivansk. [see: "The Funeral", Ivansk Project e-Newsletter, No.3, 2004.]

<sup>4</sup> The Shedlover rabbi was an important religious authority in Ivansk and came from the town of Shidlov (Yiddish; Szydłów, Polish). Yidel indicates that the rabbi visited Ivansk; however, his house is identified as #65 on the Kesten-Brauner map. It is possible that the rabbi might have taken residence in Ivansk after Yidel and his family moved to Łódź.



## Conditions in Poland and Ivansk Before World War II

With the end of World War I, Poland regained its independence. Soon after, she was attacked by the Soviet Union. The Poles put up strong resistance pushing back the mighty Russian army. Initially, the country appeared to gain ground on the economic front, and civil liberties were guaranteed for the nation's minorities. Jews enjoyed freedom as never before and several sat in the Polish parliament, the *Sejm*. However, nationalistic political movements were gaining momentum and anti-Jewish sentiments were heard on the streets and in government. The economy also began to falter and politicians provided no solutions. The threat of anarchy and revolt were very real.

Impatient with the lack of political will Józef Piłsudski, the renowned marshal of the army in the Polish-Soviet War, staged a military coup in 1926. He assumed dictatorial command of the nation, restoring order and stabilizing the economy. He tried to muffle those who advocated punitive measures against Jews, but was only moderately successful in blocking anti-Semitic legislation. After Piłsudski's death in 1935 nationalistic fervor erupted with a vengeance and social, political and economic discrimination against the Jewish minority became official policy. For instance, laws were enacted prohibiting kashrut; distribution of funds to the *gmilot hesed* (welfare) associations was curtailed, and Jews were segregated or prohibited from institutes of higher learning. Mob violence and boycotts were commonplace. And like the Nazis, Polish legislators even explored the idea of forcing Jews to leave the country. But in the late 1930s the doors to western countries were sealed against immigration. During the Great Depression, as storm clouds were brewing in Europe, the US and Canada became increasingly isolationist and xenophobic, and only a few immigrants were permitted to enter even on the most extreme humanitarian grounds. There was no way out for the Jews.

*As conditions deteriorated it became difficult for my father to provide for his family. Even bread was scarce. Then, when it seemed that life could get no worse, a fire ravaged the town. People took to the streets carrying their "bet givants" (down duvets, otherwise known as an "ibberbets").*

*My father considered going to Łódź to find work, but my grandfather tried to persuade him to stay. My father sought the counsel of the Shedlover rabbi who approved his plan. So, my father went alone to Łódź but at first was unable to send money back to Ivansk. The family was close to starvation. These were the worst times of my life in Ivansk. My father had to save money to rent an apartment in Łódź and to buy tickets for the family to come to Łódź. Even now I cannot imagine how we ever survived as we did not have money to buy even bread. After several months my father had enough money to send for some members of the family. When more money was saved I followed with my mother. At that time, I started to paint and we had a normal, comfortable, and even prosperous, life.*

*In September 1939 the Germans invaded Poland. My brother Melech as well as his new wife and my three sisters stayed in Ivansk. At the beginning we could still correspond with them until we were pushed into the ghetto (late April 1940). We stopped hearing from them once we were sent to the ghetto. Melech and his wife had a baby. As far as we know none of them survived. My brother Alter, who went to Łódź with my father, got sick and was taken to the hospital in Łódź. Alter never came home. There was an epidemic of typhus in the ghetto and a lot of people died at that time.*

Conditions in Poland deteriorated rapidly as the Germans exploited and brutalized the population. All semblance of normal life disappeared. Jews were forced into work camps and ghettos. Yidel and his family were locked into the Łódź ghetto, the largest in Poland. Because of its manufacturing base, Łódź was annexed into the Wehrmacht.

## Life in the Łódź Ghetto

Because of his artistic talent Yidel was commissioned to work in a toy factory in the ghetto. His own words express the irony of his situation: *I worked in a toy factory where I painted toys for German children while our children were being murdered.* Life was exceedingly difficult. Conditions in the ghetto went from bad to worse. In 1942 his father and one of his younger sisters were taken to Treblinka. They were never seen or heard from again.

In the ghetto Yidel continued to paint the world around him. He produced several paintings, but only 3 have survived. One of them was a portrait of Chaim Rumkowski, the leader of the *Judenrat* (the Jewish administration appointed by the Germans). Compared to the rest of the Jewish population, Rumkowski and the Jewish kapos (police) lived in relative comfort. They had extra food rations and were spared the death selections, at least for the time being.

*I remember that Rumkowski drove through the ghetto in a horse and cart (a droshky), and his picture was posted throughout with orders and proclamations. I painted a portrait of Rumkowski based on seeing him in the street and on posters. My mother and I went up to him in the street and told him that I painted his portrait. He summoned us to his office. He approved of the painting and gave us rations for food, sugar and bread.*

In 1944 Yidel was deported to Auschwitz together with the remaining Jewish population of the Łódź ghetto

*When I was in Kaufering work camp after the war an American soldier helped me find my family by placing an ad in a Toronto newspaper. My aunt saw the ad, and I arrived in Toronto in 1950. I was welcomed with open arms by my mother's sister Surah Temma and her children.*

### October 2006: Identifying Yidel's Art in Warsaw

After the war the massive task of cleaning the Łódź ghetto was undertaken. Miraculously, within the rubble three of Yidel's paintings were discovered and somehow made their way to the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

Fast forward to October 2006: a group of 50 Ivanskans traveled to Poland for the rededication of the Jewish cemetery in Ivansk.



**Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski**

As the Nazi-appointed chairman of the Judenrat in Łódź, Rumkowski had the burden of deciding who would live or die. Many Jews saw him as a traitor and collaborator. It is possible, but unlikely, that he did not know that deported Jews were sent to Chelmno for execution. But soon enough he became aware of their fate and adopted the slogan, "*Work And You Shall Eat*" (this seems to be a take on the infamous greeting on the gate to Auschwitz, "*Arbeit Macht Frei*" ("Work Will Set You Free")).

Rumkowski is best remembered for his speech, "Give Me Your Children". In September 1942 the ghetto was overpopulated. Starvation and disease ensued. The Germans ordered Rumkowski to provide a list of 24,000 people to be sent to Chelmno. He decided to select children under the age of 10 as well as thousands of older people who were unable to work.

It is said that Rumkowski displayed organizational ability, ruling with an iron hand and revelling in power. At best he was a tragic figure who was placed in an impossible no-win situation.

Before leaving for Poland Yidel told me that his Rumkowski canvas had been found but he did not know where it was located, its condition or whether other paintings had survived. So, while visiting the Jewish Historical Institute I asked one of the gallery workers if she had heard of Yidel Podeswa (or Julius Podeszwa as he was known in Poland). I told her that he had been actively painting in the Łódź ghetto and asked if the museum had any of his work. She was not familiar with his name but went off to the basement to search the archives. After an hour, as we were preparing to leave she presented me with a black and white photocopy of Yidel's portrait of Rumkowski.

I was swept up in emotion. On my return home I was very excited to show the Rumkowski photocopy to Yidel and Ruth. Yidel received it in his characteristic stoic way. Ruth was emotional. She suggested that the painting should be returned to Yidel. His response was quick. *The painting belongs where it is and it will remain there.* Who could possibly argue?

A few weeks later I received an e-mail from Magdalena Sieramska, the curator of the Jewish Historical Institute. She revealed that two additional paintings by Yidel were found in the archives and sent digital copies of them to me. A record of the correspondence about Yidel's surviving paintings is given at the conclusion of his story.

Almost 6 years have passed since I received the photos of Yidel's paintings that were recovered in Łódź. It is long overdue that they be made available to readers of the Ivansk Project e-Newsletter.

Yidel's tale is the story of a boy from Ivansk, a youth with tremendous artistic talent who through perseverance and good fortune survived the Łódź ghetto, Nazi slave labor camps, Auschwitz, and displaced person camps in Germany.

Yidel finally settled in Toronto. He attended the Ontario College of Art, and painting has been his primary vocation. Despite the tragedies of his early life, he has enjoyed a long and happy marriage of 57 years with Ruth and they have a loving family of children and grandchildren.

We are grateful that he shared his recollections of his childhood and the little town where he was born.

***"My earliest memories were of growing up very poor  
but having a happy childhood with a loving family."***

***"As children we played with nuts. We would roll metal rings with sticks about  
the town"***

***"The local countryside provided apples and pears, as well as milk and cheese".***

***"On shabbos I got dressed up and wore a satin hat. The men went to shul. I recall  
paintings on the walls of the shul. These memories of shabbos are good memories."***

***"Ivansk was not a bad place, just very poor."***

*Continued next page*

## **The Discovery of Yidel's Paintings in the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. Several e-Mails Record What Happened After Their Discovery:**

Monday, November 13, 2006 9:22 AM

Subject: Juliusz Podeszwa

Dear Mr. Lipton,

I don't know if my colleague, Robert Lewandowski answered to your letter. Now, Robert to the end of November will be on leave. We have not the colour photography of J. Podeswa painting. Tomorrow our photographer will do this photo and I send you its by e-mail. Our Museum don't possess the good professional photo implements but I hope that the quality of this photo will be good. Another informations concerning of this painting I will give you in the next e-mail.

I am very glad that thanks to you we know more details about the author of this painting. But apart from this informations which you sent I would like to know the following informations:

- 1/ in which year Mr. J. Podeswa was born
- 2/ where he studied the fine art
- 3/ Did he work in the ghetto in Wissenschaftliche Abteilung (Scientific Departament) ?
- 4/ This painting was created to Rumkowski command? What it was caused that Mr. J. Podeswa painted Rumkowski's portrait.

Yours sincerely

Magdalena Sieramska, Curator of JHI Museum

\* \* \* \* \*

Tuesday, November 14, 2006 11:10 AM

Subject: Juliusz Podeszwa

Dear Magdalena,

Thank-you very much for your response. I look forward to receiving the colour picture(s) of the painting whenever possible.

Like yourself, I feel that it is wonderful that Mr. Podeswa and his painting can be "reunited". I cannot answer the questions that you asked until I have had a chance to spend some time with Yidel. We have spoken a few times lately and our intention is to get together one day and I shall interview him. I learned that Yidel had a painting in Warsaw during an interview that I conducted with him a couple of years ago. For the last few years I have been involved in a project to rebuild and restore the Jewish cemetery at Iwaniska (Yiddish- "Ivansk"), near Opatow. Yidel lived in Ivansk until the early thirties when his family moved to Lodz.

The subject of my last interview was Yidel's childhood in Ivansk. When we discussed his early art interest, he mentioned that he had a painting somewhere in Warsaw. He had heard about this through someone at Yad Vashem. I don't think that he knew which painting or where it was located, until now.

This is a tremendous story and must be told. Can you tell me how this painting arrived at the Historical Institute? How did it survive the war? Please tell me the size (dimensions), medium (oil on canvas?), condition.

I will attempt to answer all of your questions and will advise as soon as possible. The painting is signed 1941. Yidel was not more than 18 or 19 in 1941 (actually 16 or 17). I will endeavour to discover how he came to paint Rumkowski. In 1941 conditions were still tolerable.

As far as I know Yidel has no formal art education, at least not while in Poland. He has however, worked as an artist and art teacher all of his life. [ Note added in proof: Yidel informed me that after immigrating to Canada he studied art at the Ontario College of Art for a number of years]

Thank-you again for your response. Gary Lipton

\* \* \* \* \*



[Following these exchanges with Magdalena Sieramska, I scanned the black and white photocopy of the Rumkowski painting and e-mailed it to my friend and colleague in Warsaw, Greg (Grzegorz) Gregorcyk. I asked him to translate the Polish text describing the painting. Readers of the e-News know how much Greg has contributed to The Ivansk Project.]

Tuesday, January 16, 2007 3:19 PM  
Subject: Podeswa painting

Hi Greg,

I don't recall if I told you about the attached painting. The artist, Julius (Podeswa) Podeswa, was born in Ivansk in 1924 and moved with his family to Lodz in the 30's. While in the ghetto he painted a picture of Rumkowski, the "President" of the Łódź Judenrat. Yidel was shipped to Auschwitz in the fall of 1944. He survived and only one of his many paintings in Łódź survived the ghetto- the attached. While in the Jewish Historical Institute on our dedication trip I found it in the archives. I have interviewed Yidel and plan on writing a piece for the e-newsletter.

Would you please take the time and translate the Polish writing on the archive sheet? Much appreciated.

By the way, Yidel was only 16 years old when he painted this picture in 1941!!!! Imagine!!

Hope that all is well. Gary

\* \* \* \* \*

Tuesday, January 16, 2007 9:54 AM  
Subject: RE: Podeswa painting

*[Italicized text in square brackets is how I responded to greg's letter]*

Hi Gary,

I've heard of Rumkowski (as being of ambiguous morality and "ruling" the Łódź ghetto with an iron hand) but never heard of Julius Podeswa. By the way the meaning of his name in Polish is a sole shoe, spelled like this "podeszwa" [podeshva] *[I am aware. I know Yidel quite well for years at the Ivansker Mutual Benefit Society].*

Judging by the attached picture he must have been a very talented guy!!  
*[He is still alive, healthy and painting. Attached a picture of him for you to see.]*

I can translate the stuff however you can only see a part of the text as the rest is covered under the picture. Basically it says that this is:

"a side-face portrait of an old man, wearing round glasses, with wrinkles around his eyes, grey hair, wearing a jacket and a white shirt, also wearing a star of David on his jacket on the right side. Signed in bottom right corner - ghetto 1941. A man on the picture is Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski (1877-1944)"

*[I appreciate your time.]*

All is well here, am still standing!! :-  
*[Good!!]*

Luv X2  
GG/GL

\* \* \* \* \*



Four months later I was delighted to receive the following e-mail from Ms. Sieramska

Monday, May 07, 2007 9:58 AM  
Subject: Juliusz Podeszwa

Dear Mr. Lipton,

I discovered, that in our collection we possessed two another pictures which were painted by Juliusz Podeszwa. To this day author of these works was unknown.

The base of these paintings was also the photographs.

The first show the two daughters of the Jewish policeman (his name was "Zurch") from Łagiewnicka street 27th.

The second show the exportation of the excrements.

The both was painted in oil technics on the pastboard.

The first is signed: "I. Podeszwa 1944", the second only "Litzmanstadt Getto 1943".

Yours sincerely  
Magdalena Sieramska

\* \* \* \* \*

Monday, May 07, 2007 11:00 PM  
Subject: Juliusz Podeszwa

Dear Ms. Sieramska,

It was with great pleasure that I received your "letter" today and to learn that two additional paintings by Mr. Podeszwa have been identified.

Since the second painting is not signed, how was the artist identified?

I also seek clarification regarding the description that you offered: "The second show the exportation of the excrements."

Do you refer here to the removal of human feces from the ghetto? Please clarify.

It would be greatly appreciated if you would email a scan of the two paintings as well as any additional information you can offer, such as

- size of the pasteboard?
- where discovered after the war?
- exact description?
- are any views of the city identifiable?

I have been unable to give any time to writing about the Rumkowski painting during the last few months due to an illness in the family. As it happens, I am now returning to routine and I will be sending you some information soon.

I very much appreciate hearing from you again and learning that additional paintings have survived. I will be seeing Mr. Podeszwa tomorrow and I will advise him.

Thank-you!  
Gary

\* \* \* \* \*



I did not receive a response to my last email.  
Perhaps other paintings by Yidel are still in the basement archives of the Jewish Historical Institute.  
I hope one day to return and try to shed more light on Yidel's early years.

## **AfterWords    *from* Howard Podeswa, Ruth and Yidel's Son**

*The artistic tradition lives on in the Podeswa family. Yidel's son Howard is also an accomplished artist. I met him at a recent exhibit of paintings by three Podeswa generations. He walked me through the gallery where I learned that he had visited Ivansk. I asked him if he would share his thoughts about going to Poland and walking in his ancestral shtetl. I received the following letter from Howard on 1 February 2012:*

A couple of winters ago, I went to Poland on the invitation of an IT organization, who had asked me to speak to a group of software developers. I had an ulterior motive for going: simply put, I was curious about Poland. My father is from Poland, as are all my relatives from that side of the family. Yet like most Polish Jews and their descendants, I had never thought of myself as Polish. However, recent encounters with Poles had made me wonder if there was some 'Polish' in me. Through a number of coincidences I had found myself surrounded by Poles – at home (due to renovations), at my gallery and in my studio. There was something that felt very familiar, even comfortable about these relationships, many of which quickly became friendships. I began to wonder if the Polish part of being a Polish Jew had something to do with it. So when the invitation arrived out of the blue to visit Poland, I felt I had no choice but to say yes.

My plan was to visit my father's homes and studio – to feel what it was like to walk on the ground that he walked on as a child and teenager. My host, guide and photographer for the journey was Michal Duma, the son of my friend Jan. As a person who grew up in both Poland and Canada, Michal was the perfect guide. With him I was able to gain entry into my father's home in Ivansk, and to find out what people knew - or were hiding – about the Podeswa family and the history of the Jews there.

I have no easy answers about the Polishness of my heritage. I did find something familiar in the culture that made me think of Polish Jews – a certain directness, passion for life, sense of humour and a disdain for pretense. On the "Jewish question" the answer – like everything else I discovered in Poland – seemed complex. Amongst intellectuals and artists in Warsaw I sensed a great fascination with all things Jewish. At the same time, even within this group there were few who were willing to really look at Polish responsibility for what happened to the Jews there. In Ivansk, things were less open. With only one or two exceptions, the older generation seemed very guarded and suspicious.

My time in Ivansk could best be described as surreal. Arriving late, Michal and I wandered the empty streets at night by the light of streetlamps, got stuck overnight at the Jewish cemetery outside of town, and seemed to slip back and forth from the present to the past. As an artist, the best way I have to express the feeling of that night is through painting. I began doing that a few months after returning from the trip and the works were shown as part of the exhibit, "**Sole of a Shoe**" – an exhibit of works by three generations of Podeswas – bracketed by my grandfather's painting of the Jewish cemetery in the years before the war, and my own painting of the same cemetery as I experienced it on my recent trip. I've included some paintings from the show as well as the gallery's press release (following), sent out last September:

## ***Sole of a Shoe: Three Generations of Painting*** ***Chaim Pinchas Podeszwa, Yidel Podeswa, Howard Podeswa***

The Wynick/Tuck Gallery is pleased to present the exhibition ***Sole of a Shoe: Three Generations of Painting***, Chaim Pinchas Podeszwa, Yidel Podeswa, and gallery artist, Howard Podeswa, curated by E.C. Woodley.

This exhibition represents a retrospective dialogue between three generations of artists: grandfather, father and son, painting before, during and after World War II in Ivansk and Łódź (Poland), Kaufering concentration and refugee camps (Germany), and Toronto. A special weight is given to the act of painting, its history and its language.

Chaim Pinchas Podeszwa, the head of a family of fine art painters, is represented in this show by his pre-war, folk paintings. Only two works, which were sent to relatives in Canada before the War, survive. It is on this occasion that they will be exhibited publicly for the first time in Toronto.

Yidel Podeswa was raised in Ivansk before the war. His older brother, also a painter opened a painting studio in Lodz in the 1930's, later joined by Yidel. Towards the end of the war, Yidel was deported from the Lodz ghetto to Auschwitz. He survived Auschwitz and Kaufering concentration camps by painting armbands and signage for the Nazis. One of his small watercolour works is a portrait of his fellow armband painter at work in Kaufering concentration camp in 1944.

Immediately following the war, he painted many miniature scenes of his wartime experiences. The few surviving works will be exhibited for the first time. Yidel immigrated to Toronto with his friend and fellow artist, Gershon Iskowitz. They both studied at the Ontario College of Art. Yidel exhibited at the Jack Pollock Gallery and continues to paint in Toronto.

Howard Podeswa's body of work is based on his recent trip to Poland and follows a chronology of snapshots taken by a Canadian-Polish friend, Michal Duma, as Howard searched for his father and uncle's painting studio in Lodz and the former family home in Ivansk. In their visual, narrative bent they are related to the family album and the graphic novel, yet belong deeply to the realm of painting. Ranging from miniatures to large canvases, they also push the range of the medium as a bearer of the complexities of memory.

This exhibition will be the first time that Yidel and Howard have exhibited together.

The exhibit can be viewed at the gallery's web site

- [http://www.wynicktuckgallery.ca/past\\_2011/past\\_podeswa\\_2011.htm](http://www.wynicktuckgallery.ca/past_2011/past_podeswa_2011.htm)



**Arriving At and Inside the Jewish Cemetery in Ivansk. Howard Podeswa, 2011**



## Searching for Ivansk in the Kielce Polish State Archives

by Pawel Skowron, Zgórsko (near Kielce), Poland

*[e-News Editor: Paweł Skowron's name appears in several e-Newsletters because he has helped us honor and remember our people in Ivansk.*

*I met Pawel in 2005. I was in Iwaniska to try to find any matzevot (tombstones) that might be in the hands of local residents. I also intended to interview elderly citizens who remembered their former Jewish neighbors.*

*Someone who could translate Polish into English was an absolute necessity. But Grzegorz (Greg) Gregorczyk was not able to accompany me on this trip. I enquired at the local junior high school if someone could assist me. And Pawel Skowron, who taught English, volunteered. At that time I had no idea how much he would contribute to The Ivansk Project*

*Pawel helped gather testimony and said he would appeal to his students to determine whether any tombstones were in their parent's possession. He also participated in setting-up the essay contest in the school to foster student awareness of the Ivanskers who once lived in their town (see: "We Used to Live Side by Side", Ivansk Project e-Newsletter No 19-20, 2006). Finally, he offered to ask older residents to describe the gate to the Jewish cemetery. His composite drawing was used by the architects to design the entrance to our reclaimed cemetery (see: "What did the Ivansker Cemetery Look Like?", Ivansk Project e-Newsletter No 12, 2005).*

*I returned to Iwaniska about a year later. In the interim Pawel's students lead him to a few people who had fragments of our lost matzevot, and he persuaded them to return the stones to us. Together we set off to bring these treasures back to where they really belonged. Ever since, Pawel and I have kept in touch. He is a good, generous friend.*

*Pawel, his wife and two children live in Zgórsko, about 10 km south of Kielce. He currently teaches English two days a week at a secondary school in Staszów (Stashev; Yiddish) and has developed a general interest in Polish-Jewish history. In fact, he spends most of his time working to earn a PhD at the University of Pułtusk, which is located outside Warsaw. He is studying history of the Jews of Chmielnick during the interwar years (1918-1939). Much of the material he needs is likely to be found in the regional Polish State Archives located in Kielce, the provincial capital. This repository holds documents pertaining to Chmielnick as well as Iwaniska. While searching for material relevant to his own needs, it is to be expected that Pawel might come upon files that concern Ivansk. Thus far, he has provided us with two records that relate to Ivanskers.*

*The first lists persons who were born or lived in the shtetl and later left Poland in the 1920s-1930s. As a consequence, their Polish citizenship was rescinded.*

*Pawel indicates mistakes may have been made in transcribing the information. I tabulated the entries to facilitate searching and defined some of the insertions. It will be apparent that names are spelt as they were known in Poland. Below, I shall comment on these data and also propose up-dating the information.*

*The second file contains two news items that relate to social/educational activities in Ivansk during June 1932].*





## IVANSKERS WHO EMIGRATED FROM POLAND (1924-1932)

**From:** [Pawel Skowron](#)

**Sent:** Saturday, January 14, 2012 11:30 AM

**Subject:** Iwaniska

Dear Norton

I've found a register of over 1000 Jewish persons of the *świętokrzyski* region, who have been deprived of Polish citizenship probably because they have emigrated abroad before World War II. In some instances it is noted that the act of the loss of citizenship was given by Polish consulate eg. in Paris, Munchen, Budapest, etc.

Here is a list of Iwaniska, which may interest you because there are 3 persons with your family name - the register is written by pen, so I might have mistaken in some names

Name Birth Date (D, M, Year) Place of Birth	Residence Before Emigration	Parents' Names (Mother's Maiden Name)	Date (D, M, Year) Loss of Polish Citizenship
Zylberberg, Gabrjel 08.02.1901 Iwaniska	Iwaniska	Lewek & Chaja Perla (Zaufr),	12.09.1924
Prawerman, Berek, 13.01.1901 Iwaniska	Piórków	Jojna & Lura Ita (Szpetczanger)	22.09.1924
Zajdenwar, Chil 1899 Iwaniska	Iwaniska	Jankiel & Terna (Szuchranker)	15.10.1924
Frymerman, Lejzor, 1890 Iwaniska	Iwaniska	Lipa & Inra (Ajdelman)	12.11.1924
Zalcman, Zachariasz Mendel 07.05.1902 Iwaniska	Iwaniska	Lejbuś Pejsak & Szajdla Perla (Zyngier),	12.11.1924
Tajchman, Chil Alter 1901 Iwaniska,	Iwaniska	Szlama & Bajla Ester (Mother's maiden name not recorded)	12.12.1924

<b>Iwaniski, Majer Lejbuś</b> <b>01.12.1901</b> <b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Jankiel &amp; Rajza</b> <b>(Gajst)</b>	<b>20.01.1925</b>
<b>Tajchman, Pinkwas</b> <b>17.01.1890</b> <b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Berek &amp; Bajla</b> <b>(Warcman)</b>	<b>09.07.1925</b>
<b>Primer, Izrael Dawid</b> <b>21.09.1897</b> <b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Ostrowiec</b>	<b>Lejbuś Pejsak &amp; Małka</b> <b>(Borensztaj)</b>	<b>24.07.1925</b>
<b>Rotenberg, Hercyk</b> <b>15.12.1901</b> <b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Mordka Judka &amp; Hinda</b> <b>(Wajnberg)</b>	<b>13.08.1925</b>
<b>Grynszpan, Lejzor</b> <b>21.06.1901</b> <b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Mordka Alter &amp; Rywka</b> <b>(Baltman)</b>	<b>21.11.1925</b>
<b>Frymerman, Jankiel</b> <b>1901</b> <b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Bokunów</b> <b>(A settlement</b> <b>near Iwaniska)</b>	<b>Lipa &amp; Sura</b> <b>(Ejdelkop)</b>	<b>16.12.1925</b>
<b>Goldchar, Abram Lejb</b> <b>24.01.1899</b> <b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Joel &amp; Rachla</b> <b>(Sandomirskich)</b>	<b>16.12.1925</b>
<b>Bruner, Josek Berek</b> <b>1900</b> <b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Abram &amp; Rywka Idessa</b> <b>(Teperman)</b>	<b>23.01.1926</b>
<b>Tajchman,</b> <b>Boruch Majer</b> <b>25.04. 1901</b> <b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Berek &amp; Bajla</b> <b>(Warcman)</b>	<b>12.11.1926</b>
<b>Kopersztych, Izrael</b> <b>1897</b> <b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Eljasz &amp; Fajga</b> <b>(Gotlib)</b>	<b>14.04.1926,</b> <b>Enacted in Berlin</b> <b>Consulate</b>
<b>Warszawski, Herszel</b> <b>b29.11.1902</b> <b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Dawid Berek &amp; Dwojra</b> <b>(Wagman)</b>	<b>17.05.1926</b>

<b>Rozenberg, Hersz Lejb</b> <b>01.04.1903.</b> <b>Opatów</b>	<b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Gimpel &amp; Bina</b> <b>(Apelbaum)</b>	<b>05.06.1926</b>
<b>Grynszpan, Gerszon</b> <b>05.05.1904</b> <b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Alter Mordka &amp; Rywka</b> <b>(Baltman)</b>	<b>03.02.1927</b>
<b>Rozenberg, Chaim</b> <b>06.12.1903</b> <b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Opatów</b> <b>Region</b>	<b>Moszek &amp; Ruchla Łaja</b> <b>(Frymerman)</b>	<b>22.02.1927</b>
<b>Iwaniski, Izrael Josek</b> <b>17.11.1900</b> <b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Jankiel &amp; Rajza</b> <b>(Gajstów)</b>	<b>09.03.1927</b>
<b>Hochbaum, Hersz Ela</b> <b>14.08.1902</b> <b>Ożarów</b> <b>(Opatów Region)</b>	<b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Niwa &amp; Liba</b> <b>(Iser)</b>	<b>13.07.1927</b> <b>(Opatów Region)</b>
<b>Majerczyk, Szmul</b> <b>31.03.1905</b> <b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Izrael Hersz &amp; Chaja</b> <b>(Wajnberg)</b>	<b>16.01.1928</b> <b>(Pińczów Region)</b>
<b>Wilner, Simcha</b> <b>17.03.1902</b> <b>Staszów</b>	<b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Karpel &amp; Bajla Brucha</b> <b>(Jaskółka)</b>	<b>20.05.1928</b>
<b>Lederman, Moszek</b> <b>11.01.1900</b> <b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Iwaniska,</b>	<b>Majer Wolf &amp; Fajga Sura</b> <b>(Goldman)</b>	<b>25.03.1930</b>
<b>Borensztajn, Chaim</b> <b>1907</b> <b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Iwaniska</b>	<b>Chana Rajzla</b> <b>(Father's name and Mother's</b> <b>maiden name not recorded)</b>	<b>02.01.1932</b>

*(Editor) Names are listed chronologically according to the date when Polish citizenship was supposedly terminated (right hand column). This probably does not coincide with the actual date when these people left Poland. This conclusion is based on the fact that my paternal great uncle, Pinkwas Tajchman (Pinchas Teachman) arrived in New York on 21 June 1920 on his way to Toronto. The loss of citizenship is dated approximately 5 years later (09.07.1925).*

*No women or children were listed in the file. I cannot explain this.*

*There is no doubt in my mind that many more Ivaskers emigrated from Poland during the interwar years. It is possible that archival material with additional names will emerge in the Kielce archive or in other repositories.*

*Many readers will recognize family members but information may be missing. Further, the Polish spelling may not be correct or may not correspond to the names used to identify these people after they left Poland.*

*The e-News invites corrections/additional information that you could provide to enhance the value of these data. I will publish this information as a postscript in the e-Newsletter.*

#### HOW TO UPDATE YOUR ANCESTOR'S INFORMATION

Using my paternal great uncle "Pinkwas Tajchman" (Pinchas Teachman) as an example:

Below are the data recorded in the Polish archive as well as additional information about my uncle:

Tajchman, Pinkwas 17.01.1890 Iwaniska	Iwaniska	Berek & Bajla (Warcman)	09.07.1925
---------------------------------------------	----------	----------------------------	------------

Additional information:

Name Changed to: Pinchas Teachman  
Parents: Dovid Baer and Baila (Wortzman)  
Date of Emigration from Poland: 1920  
Permanent Residence: Toronto, Canada  
Spouse: Debora (Krandel)

To have additional information included in the e-Newsletter postscript,  
please e-mail this to me by 1 May 2012 (nstaichman@comcast.net)

### Social/Educational News from Iwansk, June 1932

From: [Pawel Skowron](#)

Sent: Saturday, February 18, 2012 1:19 PM

Subject: Speeches/readings 2

Hello Norton

I found two other speeches that may interest you.

On June 18th 1932 in Iwaniska S. Rajewska, the teacher of the Jewish school in Białobrzegi gave a reading under the title, "Upbringing (education) of the future Jewish generation". There were present about 60 women and young girls. On the appeal of the lecturer, S. Rajewska one established the female organization, "BNOS AGUDAS IZRAEL" in which enrolled 25 girls.

On June 20th 1932 in Iwaniska Jakób Melamed gave a reading under the title „The action of the rebuilding of Palestine in the present time". There were present about 300 people. The lecturer presented the description of the present situation in Palestine and the Arab-Jewish relations.

Best wishes. Pawel

## Editor's notes:

### News Item of June 18th 1932

**S. Rajewska:** I was unable to find any information about this woman.

**Białobrzegi (Bialabzheg; Yiddish):** a Polish shtetl about 60 km south of Warsaw.

**BNOS AGUDAS IZRAEL (Bnos Agudas Yisroel):** In 1917 **Sarah Schenirer** (1883-1935) established the Beis Yaacov orthodox network of primary and secondary schools for girls in Poland. As opposed to government sponsored schools, **Beis Yaacov** taught both religious and secular subjects. Beginning in 1919 the number of schools grew rapidly because the **Agudas Yisroel** (a political movement of orthodox Jewry) recognized and sponsored Beis Yaacov. Sarah Schenirer also founded the **Beis Yaacov Teachers Training Seminary** and was instrumental in organizing the **Bnos Agudas Yisroel** (Daughters of Agudas Yisroel). The latter encouraged and trained young women and girls to make aliyah.

**Enrolled 25 girls:** Presumably, S. Rajewska's "appeal" resulted in 25 Ivansker girls joining Bnos Agudas Yisroel.

### News Item of June 20<sup>th</sup> 1932

**Jakób Melamed:** I could not find any information about this man.

The fact that an estimated crowd of 300 people attended the lecture on rebuilding Palestine attests to the wide interest of Polish Jews (especially young Jews) in the prospect of immigrating to the Holy Land.

I wonder where this group of 300 people held their meeting. In the shul? In the open air? Where?

Ivansk Project Action Committee		
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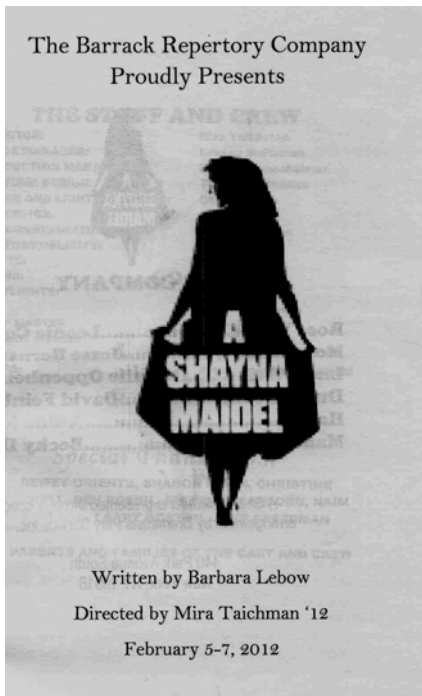
## Ivansker Teenagers Appreciate Their Heritage

by Norton Taichman, Narberth, Pennsylvania, USA



I have 3 teenage granddaughters who currently attend the Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy, an independent day school (grades 6-12) in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. Barrack holds an annual festival in celebration of Jewish history, culture and achievement. This year's (2012) program was dedicated to the memory of Polish Jewry. A variety of Polish-Jewish venues were featured, including drama, music, film, cuisine and story panels. Although the entire student body participated in the program. I want to tell you how my granddaughters contributed to the celebration. My purpose is to show that they have developed a keen interest and pride in their heritage. I suspect that most youngsters thirst for information about their familial and cultural heritage.

**Mira Taichman** (17 years old), the daughter of my son Darren and his wife Lilach, has attended Jewish day school since kindergarten and will be graduating from Barrack in a few months. Then, she'll be off to college. Mira has always been keenly interested in the dramatic arts and has participated in numerous theatrical productions. At the beginning of the current school year she was invited to direct and choose a play to be presented by the senior class. Mira decided to search for a story that complimented the Polish-Jewish theme of the Arts Festival. She selected "**A Shayna Maidel**", which was written by Barbara Lebow.



The play is about two sisters who were born in Poland before WWII. Rose was the lucky one: she immigrated to the United States before the war started. Lusia remained behind. She survived but was deeply scarred by her memories of the Shoah. The sisters lost hope of ever finding each other, but years later they were reunited in Brooklyn. The play is an intense, sometimes agonizing account of their reunion and the adjustments that each had to make in order to understand and accommodate the other.

In her own words Mira describes why she chose *Shayna Maidel*:

*As I was reading plays, looking for one to direct, I decided that I wanted to do more than simply entertain the audience for two hours. I wanted to present people with something thought-provoking, so that they would walk out of this theatre a little bit different than when they came in. When I found Shayna Maidel, I knew it was the right choice.*

*I'm fascinated by Polish Jewish history, and want to share my sense of responsibility for preserving and understanding it with*

others. The faded culture of Polish Jewry is revived on stage in this production. The character's accents are an especially important part of capturing the Yiddish flavor, and distinguishing between reality, memory, and fantasy. In scenes that take place in real time, Lusya speaks in accented English. However, when her mind drifts to memory or fantasy, the accent disappears to indicate that she is speaking fluently in her native language. A Shayna Maidel also brings Yiddish culture back to life by telling the story of the Holocaust in an unusual way. We never see a Nazi uniform or a death camp in this drama. Rather, Shayna deals with the lives of those who went through this horrific ordeal –both before and after the war.

The players, the company and the director of Shayna Maidel received standing ovations.

\* \* \* \* \*



The Shining Faces of the Class of 2015. Barack Hebrew Academy (2012)  
● Ariel Taichman-Robins      ● Rebecca Taichman

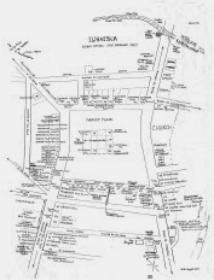
My granddaughters **Ariel Taichman-Robins** and **Rebecca Taichman** are 14 years old and grade 9 students at Barrack. (Ariel is the daughter of Susan (my daughter) and her husband, Michael. Darren and Lilach are Rebecca's parents.) . Rebecca has attended Jewish day school since kindergarten, while Ariel transferred from our local public high school to Barrack at the beginning of the school year.

As their contribution to the festival, both girls prepared exhibits that dealt with our family's story in Poland. To learn more about this subject, they contacted me and we spent about 3 hours looking at family photos of our Ivansker ancestors. We discussed who was behind the faces and what I knew about them. I also gave the girls a tour of the Ivansk Project web site and drew their attention to testimonies published in the e-Newsletter about Ivanskers who survived the Shoah in Poland. When we finished, I had no idea what would come out of our meeting. I had to wait until a few days before the festival opened to see what they had put together. I was very pleased.

**Ariel** prepared a "personal panel" to introduce her great, great grandfather, Chamol Teichman (spelt "Tajchman" in Poland) to fellow students and visitors attending the festival. Standing beside her poster, Ariel provided more information and answered questions about the life of Chamol Teichman. who was born in Ivansk in 1882.

## Chamol Taichman

Ivansk is a small village located in Poland. Before 1910, only 35,000 people lived in Ivansk, 50% of whom were Jewish. Jews were mainly peasants and merchants. For fun children living in the shtetl played hide n' seek and traded matzah for sausage with the Christian boys. Boys spent most of their days in *chederim* (a small school) until the age of twelve. From home they learned Yiddish and learned to raise a family. They were never offered a proper education. Girls who grew up in Ivansk spent their childhood getting prepared to marry and raise children.



A reconstructed map of Ivansk



Original home in Ivansk



Taichman family in Canada  
Chamol Taichman first row second from the left.

Chamol, a friendly young boy grew up in the poor *shtetl* of Ivansk. When he was younger he got along with all the Polish people. Chamol and his wife Rhuda Silverberg had four children in Poland—Lily, Lemel, Myer, and Gershon who died from pneumonia at age 2. In Poland he worked as a horse trader and barely had enough money to support his family. He raised his children in a very religious home. In 1910, Chamol, at the age of 35, came to Toronto, Canada. He started as a peddler. A few years later he started his own soda pop business to support his family. Chamol's family joined him in Canada in 1920.

The "K-B Map of Ivansk" offered a glimpse of how the town was laid out and where Jews lived and worked. A photo of a humble, 1-2 room white-washed cottage in contemporary Ivansk served as a model for the type of structure that housed many Ivansker families during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Finally, a photograph was used to discuss individual members of Chamol's family. The picture was taken in Toronto in 1926.

Chamol immigrated to Canada in 1910. He left Poland because of the dismal economy. Initially, he worked as a rag peddler but within a couple years was able to buy a soda pop business. He was doing very well and by 1914 tried to bring his wife and 3 children to Canada. But the First World War erupted and prevented communication. Chamol's family had to survive without his support until the war ended in 1918. It was not until 1920 that the family was finally reunited in Toronto. Chamol and Ruda Bleima (Zylberberg/Silverberg; born in Ivansk in 1884) had 6 surviving children.

**Rebecca** produced a film based on "**The Funeral**", **Yitz'chak Goldstein's** testimony of what transpired in Ivansk the day before the town's Jews were deported by the Germans to Treblinka (see: Ivansk Project e-Newsletter No. 3, March-April 2003.). To protect their religious articles Ivanskers gathered in the Jewish cemetery and buried their Torahs and other sacred treasures. I have read Goldstein's account several times. Each time it is more painful and less comprehensible than the one before.

Rebecca quoted directly from Goldstein's narrative employing images of Ivanskers and Ivansk, as well as other sources, to create a powerful record of that horrible time. She obviously identified with her people. She understood what can happen when anti-Jewish prejudice and hate overrides the conscience of individuals or nations. For Rebecca "The Funeral" was personal and real. In the vernacular, "Becca really gets it".

Rebecca's film, "**The Funeral, Ivansk, October 1942**" can be seen on YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Upvstic0MpE>

\* \* \* \* \*

**Elya (Eli) Taichman** is my eldest grandchild (20 years old), the son of Darren and Lilach. He graduated from Barrack in 2010 and is now a sophomore at the University of Pennsylvania. While Elya did not take part in the festival, he fits into the message I am trying to convey. e-Newsletter readers may remember that in 2006 Elya accompanied me to Poland to find any matzevot remaining in our cemetery (see: Ivansk Project e-Newsletter No 18, May-June 2006) In his own words:

*At this time I felt very special. I had just come to the very place that I might have been living in had my family not left many years ago (providing there was no Holocaust). The fact that I was seeing where I could have lived was truly amazing. I don't think that anyone else in my class, my grade, or even my school has ever gotten to experience this. In*



Elya  
Ivansk, 2006

*fact, I would not be surprised if the majority of the kids in my school did not know the name of the town their family comes from. The work that I did there was so important. Not only was it a great mitzvah, it also let me discover who I was and where I came from.*

It was a profound experience for a 14 year old, and Elya still thinks of it that way. In his application to attend the University of Pennsylvania Elya was required to write an essay describing a transformative moment in his life. He told the Admission Committee about discovering who he was during his time in Ivansk.

\* \* \* \* \*

Like most first and second "Post-Ivansk Generations", I grew up with little knowledge of my roots in Poland. Although I knew the names of many of my ancestors, it was not nearly enough. I needed to know more than names, dates and connections to dead relatives. I was starving for knowledge about the lives actually lived by my people. My involvement in The Ivansk Project is helping to satisfy my curiosity and has impacted on my sense of self. I have shared what I have learned with my children and they in turn are making sure that their children know who they are and where they come from.

I hope that The Ivansk Project has helped other Ivanskers to better understand their past and to transmit this knowledge to their descendants. I understand that the circumstances and dynamics in your family are not likely to be the same as mine. No matter. The most important element is the commitment of parents, grandparents and other family members to nourish their young to appreciate their place in the family tree and to take pride in the history of the family and the Jewish people.

Believe it or not, our youngsters are interested in more than just iPads, Facebook, Twitter and other electronic gadgetry. They are readily engaged by information about their heritage and will eagerly accept the responsibility of becoming the guardians of their family's history and preserving Jewish memory.

I believe that Elya, Mira, Ariel and Rebecca are on the right track. I am optimistic that my younger grandchildren and the generations to come will fare as well.

I wish the same for you and your family.

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